

Critical Days of Summer:

More Fun, Bigger Risks

Summer is the time of year when Sailors and Marines head to the nation's beaches, lakes and parks. They take advantage of the nicer weather and time off to do more sightseeing and to visit more family and friends. Unfortunately, our database shows they also have more mishaps.

These mishaps create a well-recognized negative trend, one that is shared by all services: the comparatively high toll of off-duty and recreational mishaps. Since the 1960s, military safety specialists have called the period between Memorial Day weekend and Labor Day weekend the "Critical Days of Summer." By any measure, it's a period of increased risk for Sailors and Marines.


During the 2006 Critical Days of Summer, 20 Sailors and 24 Marines died, with traffic fatalities the frontrunner. In many years, between one-third and nearly half of a year's total Navy and Marine Corps deaths occur during the Critical Days of Summer.

Why are the Critical Days so dangerous? Many factors come into play. Traffic risks increase because, with schools out, many service members transfer, which means more families are traveling between duty stations. When service members visit home, they often travel for too long a time without rest or a break. Recreational safety specialists sometimes call summer "the drowning season," simply because of increased exposure at beaches and lakes, on boats, and, increasingly, on the popular personal watercraft.

For each increased risk, there are controls, and our 2007 Critical Days of Summer campaign aims to make those controls clear and easy to apply. Stay tuned to our website (www.safetycenter.navy.mil) for all the latest tools available to help you get through this period safely. A simple "Critical Days of Summer" search should give you a host of choices.

In the meantime, here are some common-sense tips to help you avoid the obvious risks:

- Never drink and drive, regardless if the vehicle is a car, motorcycle, boat, etc.
- Wear your seat belt and make sure all passengers do the same.
- Get plenty of rest before and while traveling.
- Don't swim alone or in unknown waters; also pay attention to changes in weather and water conditions.
- Use U.S. Coast Guard-approved PFDs when boating or riding personal watercraft.
- Don't overexert yourself during athletic events; stretch thoroughly and drink plenty of water.
- Use sunscreen during outdoor activities.

Whether you're at home, at the beach, or at work, you should be alert to your surroundings and make smart decisions to reduce or eliminate unnecessary risks. Always ask yourself, "If I take this risk, can I live with the consequences?" The choice is yours, so make it a safe one. 



Fourth of July fireworks displays are just one popular attraction that occurs during the Critical Days of Summer. The secret to keeping this and all summertime activities mishap-free is to apply the principles of operational risk management.

Navy photo by J03 Ryan C. McGinley